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19 August 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Soviet Tactics in the Berlin Crisis

1. With the action of 13 August, the Communists have taken a long step toward their objectives in Berlin and have created a new political situation there. The border controls instituted on that date have met East Germany's most pressing need by reducing the refugee flow to tolerable proportions. At the same time, Berlin has been transformed into two virtually separate cities, with the eastern portion all but incorporated into the GDR. Thus the Soviets, induced by the rising tide of refugees, have taken unilateral action to achieve a result which they had intended to accomplish at a later date and by different means.

2. The refugee question, however, was only one aspect of the larger problem of stabilizing the GDR, and the closing of the Berlin escape route may worsen other

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aspects if it leads to a buildup of tensions within East Germany. Even apart from this, the stemming of the refugee flow will not change the USSR's view of the necessity to bolster the GDR's claims to sovereignty and eventually to eject Western influence from Berlin altogether. We do not believe that the USSR has given up its intention to press for a peace treaty and a "free city." The question is whether the Soviet leaders will accelerate their movement towards these objectives, or will moderate their pace after their considerable achievements of 13 August.

3. The action in Berlin has initiated a momentum which the Soviets may wish to sustain. A wide variety of further unilateral measures is available to them. One fairly safe option is to carry to its conclusion the destruction of Berlin's four-power status by denying Allied rights to enter East Berlin. The termination of military liaison arrangements of the occupation^{*} would also be a relatively low-keyed act

* The US, French, and British forces in West Germany presently have military missions accredited to the Soviet commander in East Germany, who in turn has missions to the three Allied commanders.

which might appear to the Soviets as a means of keeping events moving in their favor. More drastically, the East Germans might disrupt or harass civil traffic between West Berlin and the Federal Republic; most dangerous of all, interference with Allied access might begin. Politically, the USSR might choose to accelerate the timing of a peace conference and a separate treaty with the GDR.

4. In our previous estimates, we have pointed to the increasing involvement of Soviet prestige as a factor which would importantly affect the USSR's timing and tactics. In fact, Khrushchev in recent weeks has reacted to the stiffening US attitude by increasing his commitment to early action. He now asserts that the issue transcends the problems of Germany and Berlin, important as these remain, and that the West's refusal to conclude a peace treaty represents an attempt to achieve a "strategic breakthrough" against the Bloc. In claiming a challenge to Soviet power and prestige, he wishes to convey to his opponents that the Soviet Union cannot be expected to draw back from crisis situations in which reason and prudence

would appear to dictate restraint. Having taken this stand, Khrushchev probably considered that a formal Soviet offer of negotiations would have been taken as a sign of weakness. Such a proposal, by reducing the sense of imminent crisis, might have diminished the refugee flow. Instead, Khrushchev chose to meet the problem with a repressive response which would strengthen the image of inflexible resolve.

5. In our recent estimates of the USSR's policy toward Germany and Berlin, we have regularly attributed to the Soviet leaders a confidence that they can move gradually toward their eventual objectives without incurring unacceptable risks. We have pointed to their belief that the West could probably be induced to make negotiated concessions. And we have further estimated that, if these Soviet expectations are not borne out, the USSR will move unilaterally, but still intending to proceed in such a way as to avoid at any stage unduly high risks of war.

6. We believe that Soviet actions in the latest phase of the Berlin crisis do not indicate that the USSR has departed from this general approach and method. Thus we conclude

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that the USSR's present intention probably is not to take further radical action immediately. The Soviets would probably respond to manifestations of Western resoluteness with further unilateral acts of limited scope. But we believe that their present preference is to return to diplomatic activity in order to determine whether their latest moves have made the Western Powers more inclined to accept Soviet terms of negotiation.

7. We think it unlikely, however, that Khrushchev will take the initiative in officially offering East-West talks. He clearly wishes to appear as the champion of negotiations, and he may throw out hints, in an effort to encourage a Western proposal, that the USSR could be persuaded to reduce its demands if a conference were arranged. If presented with a Western invitation, he would seek to give the impression of a favorable response, but at the same time attempt to define the task of the conference in a fashion which served Soviet interests. If negotiations do not materialize, we believe that

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the next Soviet step will be to issue, sometime during the next several months, invitations to their own peace conference, probably accompanied by a revised draft of a treaty applicable to both German states and providing for the declaration of a "free city" in West Berlin.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

Abbot Smith
Acting Chairman